

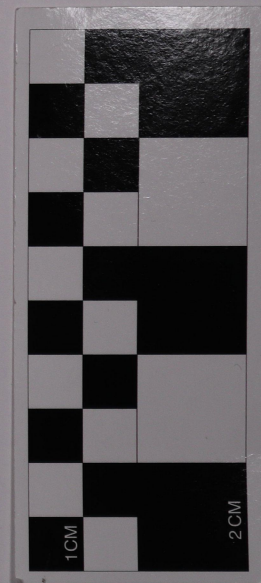
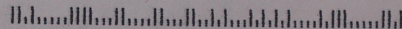
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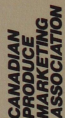
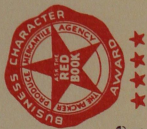
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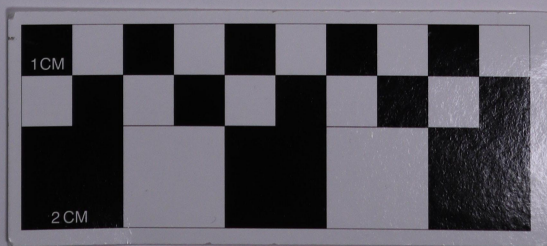
2/20/2002

Janet:

The enclosed article is of interest
and with the students at Arcadia
Hi suppose to donate 20 hours
To Charitable work - Maybe we
should consider getting them
started as docents. I am sure
younger people, visiting the
museum, would be more inclined
to be more interested in older
students taking them through
the museum as docents.

Just a thought.

Charles



Art & Architecture

By VIVIAN LETRAN

Youthful, long-haired and dapper, Francisco George isn't quite who you expect to see leading museum tours.

"Sometimes I feel a little self-conscious because of my hair, my age and what I wear," said the 41-year-old George, an artist who makes his living selling vintage collectibles at the Rose Bowl swap meets. He's always wanted to attend art school, but with the expensive tuition, he opted to learn about art history at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art—as a docent.

Many museums have a program for docents, a fancy title given to volunteers who teach, or they pay "art educators"—mostly scholars, historians, graduate students or artists—to do the honors. Volunteer docents study for one to five years before they can lead exhibition tours, present lectures and hold workshops at schools or at the museums. They also answer visitors' simple, commonly asked questions: "Where's the restroom?" or "Which way to the gift shop?"

George represents the changing face of docents throughout Southern California. New recruits at museums both large and small are breaking conventional molds. These days, they aren't just cheery retirees. They're working professionals, parents, self-employed entrepreneurs and students, ranging from their teens to mid-50s.

Diversification has been in the air at museum docent councils for the last five years. "Our goal is for visitors to feel that someone reflects their group," said Louise Palermo, an education specialist and docent coordinator who oversees the 530-member docent program at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

"Your stereotypical docent is a 51-year-old woman with white hair, and God bless them, we need them. But we have them as well as younger people and men."

Leaders of docent programs in Southern California say one-third to one-half of recruits are increasingly male, bilingual, younger than 50 and from different ethnic backgrounds.

"We have docents who speak Spanish, Russian, French, German and communicate in American Sign Language," said educa-

tion director Kim Hayden of the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. At the Autry, in a docent program with 100 volunteers, those who work in the collection and conservation department are called "Buffalo Dusters." Others who help organize member activities and large events such as exhibition openings are dubbed "Trailblazers."

"Without docents, I think museums risk becoming far too insular. They're integral to our success," Hayden said, adding that the volunteers are 10% of the mu-

seum's work force. They donate 20,000 hours in a year—the equivalent of 11 full-time staffers—and save the museum \$400,000 annually.

As they guide tours or stuff, lick and stamp envelopes, Hayden adds, they give the institution personality.

"Every member of my family participates in the museum. My grandson comes to vacuum and my granddaughters come and file papers and clean a bit," said docent Ann Beasley of the Surf Museum. The small, quirky Hunting-

ton Beach institution is run entirely by 50 volunteers, who elect 11 directors to act as officers.

George relishes volunteering and not just at LACMA. He spends his weekdays heading a local historic preservation group and working at the thrift shop at his church. In October, after a year of intense study, he became a docent and says the work is challenging. Demanding tour schedules test George's resolve on tough days. But there's satisfaction in the

The Changing Faces of Docents

Many museums are looking to meet the needs of visitors by diversifying their staffs of guides and educators.



LACMA docent Francisco George discusses a painting with students from Trinity Lutheran School.

CARLOS CHAVEZ / Los Angeles Times

work. For the next five years, he'll be working exclusively with children.

"I do it for the kids. This is about fun, to help the kids have fun with art. It helps for them to see a Latino man's face, the color of my skin, and they need to hear my accent. Most of the schoolchildren can identify with me," said George, who leads pigtailed, braces-wearing, energetic schoolchildren on tours through LACMA's permanent collection where they encounter mummies and Chinese scrolls.

George discovered the volunteer program after he answered a newspaper ad seeking bilingual docents at LACMA. "I had no idea what docents did. Being a docent now [lets] me to nurture my artistic side and give back to the community," he said.

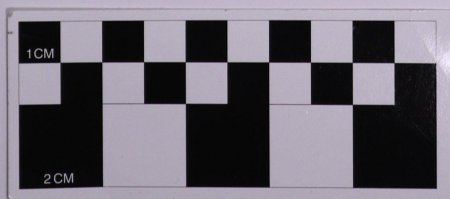
Museums are beginning to rely on bilingual docents such as George to reach out to an increasing number of multicultural visitors. In addition to its core 140 docents, the Bowers Museum of Cultural Art in Santa Ana began an "ambassadors" program for Chinese tourists during the run of its high-profile exhibition "Secret World of the Forbidden City: Splendors From China's Imperial Palace."

"We had anticipated there would be a lot of Chinese visitors for this exhibit. If we had Chinese-speaking ambassadors, they would feel more at home," said Anne Shih, president of the Chinese Arts Council and a board member at Bowers.

The right docent can really enhance a visit to the Getty or any museum, says Palermo.

"A good [touring] docent helps you focus on a few things instead of having you absorb the entire museum in one visit, which can be overwhelming," Palermo said. "We want people to have a meaningful experience with art, so we're looking for volunteers who are friendly, willing and who have a desire to help others learn and discover."

"The difference with a job is that you're going in to work each day because you have to," said Sheila Good, former chairwoman of the 564-member Docents Council at LACMA and an active docent. "As a docent, you learn something simply because you want to. That's just a delicious feeling, and you're with others who feel that same way."





GLENN KOENIG / Los Angeles Times

tographer Richard Ross discusses an exhibition of his work at raining session for Orange County Museum of Art docents.

All my friends are docents except two. It's a tightknit group," Rosalind Sanger, a bilingual docent for the Getty since 1997 and MA since 1977. "When I have lunch with my friends, we're talking about art."

Many docents take field trips art tours together. They also a few perks: glossy catalogs, stings with their favorite artists, museum lunches and parties are artists, collectors and others are.

They may be volunteers, but being a docent is a significant responsibility in most of major museums. Homework take up to 20 hours a week. re are assignments to read, re trips to make, videos to ch and museum lectures to at-

Most museums, docents write own scripts for exhibition that can change every th. Minimum work hours are ired. Some docent programs are extra fees, museum memberships and uniforms. Quizzes, as and evaluations are com-

ter training, the education inues with lectures by curaguest artists and speakers, shops, and group tours to pri-collections, art studios or r museums and galleries.

Docents tend to be lifelong ers, and we provide them plenty of opportunity," Hay-said.

er reviews or annual evaluas allow some docent councils up standards. "When you do a long time, you can start to

slack a bit," LACMA and Getty docent Sanger. LACMA docents are evaluated by their peers every two years.

Being a docent can be competitive at times, with docents vying for elected seats on councils or in subcommittees. In large and small docent circles, there can be political infighting. Things can get downright scandalous at times. In 1999, LACMA deemed a docent's description to a school tour of Edward Kienholz's "Back Seat Dodge '38"—a work that depicted a couple in what appears to be a drunken sexual embrace—as inappropriate. She was dismissed.

But docents generally aren't that high-profile. Many simply become lifelong friends of the museum—members or even donors. Last year, the Orange County Museum of Art received about \$710,000 from a couple who served as long-time docents. The money, earmarked for the endowment, helped fund the museum's 125-member volunteer program, which was renamed the Camille and Eric Durand Docent Council in their honor.

Docent programs, however,

Want to Volunteer?

Here's who to call to volunteer as a docent at a museum.

Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles. Kim Hayden or Caren Lea. (323) 667-2000, Ext. 242.

Bowers Museum of Cultural Art, Santa Ana. Mary Jane Schrader, Meredith Wylie or Carol Hallenbeck. (714) 567-3600.

Huntington Library, San Marino. Mikki Heydorff (626) 405-2126.

The Irvine Museum, Irvine. Christine DeWitt. (949) 476-0294.

J. Paul Getty Museum, Los

Angeles. Louise Palermo. (310) 440-7146.

Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach. Marjorie Gorum. (949) 494-8971.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles. Sharon Bressler. (323) 857-6000.

Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach. David Curtius. (949) 759-1122, Ext. 204.

Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles. Marcia Rosenthal. (310) 440-4656.

Surf Museum, Huntington Beach. Ann Beasley or Michelle Juhasz. (714) 960-3483.

don't work for all museums. Venues such as the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena and Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art do not have docent programs.

"When you just go for volunteers, you just don't have that high quality control," said Suzanne Isken, MOCA's education director.

In place of docents, these museums have hired art educators, part-time staff who lead exhibition tours.

"There's a contemporary art scene that requires us to stay on top of now, the everyday. It's not historically placed," said Isken, who oversees the paid "gallery educators," who replaced docents at MOCA in 1991.

"So that makes contemporary art very complex," she continued. "Many people who come to the museum with a degree of fear or intimidation of contemporary art want someone to explain and help them understand the art. The paid educators spend their lives with this."

For museums that rely on volunteer docents, flexible, weekend hours and other incentives are helping to further diversify the vol-

unteer group.

"I admire the commitment of many of the longtime docents. They know the exhibitions and artists all by heart. I want to be like those older ladies in about 30 or so years," George said.

Vivian Letran is a Times staff writer.

Art

■ Announcements must be received at least three weeks in advance; because of space limitations, not all will be listed. Send to Art Listings, Calendar, Los Angeles Times, 202 W. 1st St., Los Angeles, CA 90012.

Openings

TODAY

American Art: Celebrating Our Diverse Cultures (Finegood Art Gallery, 22622 Vanowen St., West Hills, [818] 464-3200). Multimedia work by Sherry Adams, Barbara Buresh, Joseph Beckles, Joe Bravo, Nora Gabai, Conroy Gedeon, Susan Kim, Alex Linn and others. Ends March 27.

Break the Silence: Art and HIV/AIDS in South Africa (UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 405 Hilgard Ave., Westwood, [310] 825-4361). Baskets and banners from women's workshops in the Kwa Zulu-Natal Province. Ends April 28.

Where Masks Still Dance: Photographs of New Guinea by Chris Rainier (Pacific Asia Museum, 46 N. Los Robles Ave., Pasadena, [626] 449-2742). Photographs documenting wilderness areas and indigenous cultures. Ends April 28.

TUESDAY

Group Show: What's the Story, Morning Glory? (Gallery 825, 825 La Cienega Blvd., West Hollywood, [310] 652-9272). Narrative work. Ends March 3.

Please see Page 64

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